



For Immediate Release
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**Opening Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Children's Health Insurance Markup**

Sir Winston Churchill famously told the House of Commons: "[W]hat is our aim? . . . It is victory . . . however long and hard the road may be"

Long and hard has been the road for children. It has been longer and harder than we thought it would be. It has been too long and too hard to extend health care to children in American families who are struggling to get by.

But, at last, God willing, victory is in sight.

We have been down this road before. Two long years ago, we began our journey with a budget resolution reserve fund for children's health insurance coverage.

Today, we hope to take some of the last steps down that road. Today, we are here to strengthen children's health. Today, we are here to complete this unfinished business.

CHIP works. In its first 10 years, the Children's Health Insurance Program cut the number of children without health insurance by more than a third.

In my home state of Montana, CHIP covers more than 17,000 children today. And thanks to a ballot initiative that the people of Montana passed last November, CHIP will soon cover many more children.

Health insurance matters. Children with health coverage are more likely to get the health care that they need. And they are more likely to get health care when they need it.

Because of CHIP, more than seven million children get checkups. They see doctors when they are sick. They get the prescription medicines that they need.

Uninsured children suffer. Today, one in every 10 children goes without coverage. Uninsured kids are less likely to get care for sore throats, earaches, and asthma. Most uninsured children have not had a checkup in the past year.

When care is delayed, small problems can become big problems. And those big problems lead to missed school days and hospitalizations.

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CHIP is an investment. A child who's healthy can go to school. A child who's healthy in school is more likely to do well. A child who does well in school is more likely to get a job. And people with jobs are less likely to end up in jail or on public assistance.

Ensuring that kids have health coverage is an investment in America's future.

It's time to strengthen the Children's Health Insurance Program. Nine million children have no health insurance. Americans overwhelmingly support covering kids.

And it has been long and hard to get where we are today. In July 2007, the Finance Committee marked up a bill that would have covered 3.2 million more children in CHIP. The bill passed the Senate on August 2.

The House passed its version that same week.

A month later, we reached a bipartisan, bicameral compromise. And both chambers passed the bill.

Unfortunately, on October 3, 2007, President Bush vetoed the bill. And the House was unable to override the veto.

Congress passed a second reauthorization bill. But President Bush vetoed the bill a second time on December 12, 2007.

But then the American people spoke. And now, with strong support from President-Elect Obama, we will finally be able to respond.

Today, we consider legislation to keep coverage for all children currently in the program. And we will start to reach nearly four million additional uninsured, low-income kids.

We keep CHIP focused on kids. Childless adults who are covered today will transition off of the program. This bill will allow no new waivers for CHIP coverage of childless adults.

Coverage of low-income parents will transition to separate block grants, at a lower match rate. This bill will allow no new waivers for CHIP coverage of parents.

States will be able to designate CHIP funds to help families afford private coverage offered by employers or other sources.

And we pay for what we do. Like the vetoed bills, this legislation will increase the Federal tax on cigarettes by 61 cents. We also make proportional increases for other tobacco products.

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Increasing the cigarette tax will discourage smoking, particularly among teens. And that will be good for kids, too.

The Children's Health Insurance Program is the legacy of work by Senators of good will from across the political spectrum.

Much of that work was done by our Colleagues Jay Rockefeller and Orrin Hatch. In this last Congress, Chuck Grassley and I worked with Jay and Orrin to craft both consensus packages. I thank my Colleagues for their hard work, their patience, and their commitment to getting something done.

CHIP has worked successfully for 12 years. Nine out of 10 Americans want Congress to add new funds to CHIP.

And so, let us complete our journey down this long, hard road. Let us, as last, achieve this victory. And let us extend health care coverage to nearly four million American children.

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